

HORIZONS

Students benefit from science, math sessions at annual conference



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NORMAL — Jasmyne Lawrence got to play with food Saturday.

Instead of eating marshmallows, she used them to build a spaceship, which passed its test with flying colors.

“Mine did well because I used straws to build it instead of cardboard,” Lawrence said.

The 12-year-old from Bloomington was among 60 students who participated in the Expanding Your Horizons Conference, a yearly math and science seminar for middle school and high school students from the Twin Cities and beyond.

Students from Bloomington-Normal and Chicago were able to take sessions on Saturday on astronomy, psychology, plants, medicine, solar technology and economics at Illinois State University’s Stevenson Hall.

Carol Benson, a math professor at ISU and University High School — and the event’s main organizer — said the workshops provide students with an understanding of math and science in everyday life. With the way technology has permeated every industry, these skills are essential for students as they move into their careers, Benson said.

“Everyone needs to be proficient in math, at least a base level of understanding,” Benson said. “It’s critical for being a good parent and a good citizen and for finding a job.”

Khalil Ryals, a Chicago eighth-grader, said he learned about basic economic principles in Saturday’s workshops. Now he will be able to see supply and demand at work when he goes shopping at stores, he said.

As a case worker for the Center for Youth and Family Solutions in Bloomington and a volunteer at the event, Iris Hildreth said the workshops also help students, many from minority backgrounds, see that a college education is accessible.

“They get to talk to scientists in the field of both genders and do hands-on activities,” Hildreth said. “It’s a great peer-mentoring opportunity; they get to see role models and they come into a college setting.”

Some of the students who attended the workshops are from families that receive help through

the center, Hildreth said. The children wouldn't have access to mentoring from professionals in science and math fields without Expanding Your Horizons, which completed its 22nd year Saturday. The event helps them begin to think of what career paths they might choose, Hildreth said.

Lawrence said she has settled on a career as a result of the workshops, which also included interactions with turtles and cockroaches.

"I like animals and want to take care of them," Lawrence said. "I don't think it's fair that our world takes over theirs."